

The Church That Tolerated Jezebel (Revelation 2:18-29)

Introduction

- 1) There is good news and bad news when we look at the church today. It really is a “mixed bag.” For example, *Baptist Press* ran a story on February 16, 2001 entitled “Internet becomes symbol of purity for 31,000 teens who ‘seized the Net’.” “Often a forum for racy exchanges, the Internet became a symbol of purity Feb. 14 for thousands of teens who logged on to take an electronic stand for sexual morality. In the 47 hours it took Valentine’s Day to rise in New Zealand and fall in Hawaii, 31,338 teenagers pledged to God and their future mates they would abstain from sex until marriage. “We were really pleased with the response from teens on this,” said Paul Turner, spokesperson for True Love Waits. “On Valentine’s Day 2001, 31,000-plus students made a commitment to live a life of purity. A lot of kids’ lives will be spared much heartache because they have made that decision.” LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention sponsors the international campaign, which urges teenagers to choose a sex-free lifestyle until they enter a biblical marriage relationship.... LifeWay launched the sexual abstinence campaign in April 1993. In 1994, more than 211,000 True Love Waits cards covered the National Mall in Washington, D.C.; in 1996, more than 350,000 cards were stacked to the roof of the Georgia Dome in Atlanta; and in 1999, teens carried 100,000 pledge cards across the mile-long Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. National True Love Waits leaders estimate more than 1 million teens have signed cards pledging sexual abstinence until marriage. The covenant cards signed online Feb. 14 by teens state: “Believing that true love waits, I make a commitment to God, myself, my family, my friends, my future mate and my future children to be sexually abstinent from this day until the day I enter a biblical marriage relationship.... However, Turner said, TLW is more than just a pledge to remain abstinent. “At the heart of the pledge, these kids are committing to God to live a life of purity,” Turner said. “We have told teens that there is nothing magical about signing a pledge card. But when a teenager seriously takes into account the pledge he or she is making and to whom the pledge is made, a lifestyle emerges that is true to the biblical standards that God established for sex,” he said. A study published in the January 2001 *American Journal of Sociology*, meanwhile, found that teenagers who pledge to remain sexually abstinent until marriage are 34 percent less likely to have sex than those who do not take virginity vows.” (*Baptist Press*, 2-16-01). This is great news, wonderful news, teens taking a stand for God and against the world.

- 2) On the other hand, and in stark contrast, look at what recently transpired in the Atlanta Baptist Association in Georgia. On January 30, 2001 messengers to the Associational meeting refused to dismiss Oakhurst Baptist Church and Virginia-Highland Baptist Church who “affirm, approve and endorse homosexual behavior as an acceptable Christian lifestyle.” *Baptist Press* also reporting on this story noted, “Homosexual activists across the nation heralded the Atlanta Baptist Association’s decision as an affirmation of the homosexual agenda, with Tim Shirley, senior pastor of Virginia-Highland Baptist Church, telling *Baptist Press* the vote was an affirmation of their ministry to homosexuals.” (*Baptist Press*, 2-15-01) This has ignited a firestorm in Atlanta and the potential for a massive withdrawal of Baptist Churches from the Atlanta Associations is almost certain. Amazing isn’t it. Here are Christian teenagers taking a stand for Christ and biblical morality, while professing Christian adults at the same time chart a course of moral perversion that rejects outright the Bible’s teaching. Some Atlanta churches, while opposing the acceptability of the homosexual

lifestyle themselves, have taken cover under the banners of local “church autonomy” and the “priesthood of believers” as their rationale for not dismissing Oakhurst and Virginia-Highlands. Apparently they are a lot like the church at Thyatira in the First Century. They are willing to tolerate Jezebel in the church. They are willing to let the world make itself at home in the congregation.

Transition

This kind of situation does not escape the notice of our Lord. With crystal clear clarity He sees the situation and He deals with it directly.

I. Christ is characterized by decisive judgment. 2:18

Angel – messenger, pastor, angelic being

Write – this is the longest of the 7 letters and yet Thyatira was the least known and the least important of the 7 cities. Chuck Swindoll says Thyatira was to Ephesus what Flat Creek, Tennessee is to Los Angeles, or Cut-‘n-short, Texas is to Chicago!

Thyatira was an expendable military outpost 40 miles southeast of Pergamos. It was only important through its commerce in wool, linen, leatherwork, bronzework and especially purple dye. It had an extensive network of trade guilds or labor unions that dominated daily and civic life. Each union had its own patron deity, feasts, and seasonal celebrations that often included sexual immorality. Apollos the sun god and Diana the fertility god were the more significant deities. Acts 16:14 teaches us that Lydia, whom Paul led to Christ at Philippi, was from Thyatira and a seller of purple. It is quite possible she was instrumental in evangelizing Thyatira. By all worldly appearances the city was unimportant and the church rather insignificant. This is not the judgment of Jesus. Big or small, well known or hardly known at all, every church is important to Jesus. Whether you have 10,000; 1,000; 100; or 10 members makes no difference to Him. He wants you to be pure where you are planted. He wants you to honor Him wherever your home is.

1. Know that Jesus’ judgment is perceptive.

Son of God – appears only here in Revelation and stands in contrast to the “sun god.” Apollo is a piddley pseudo sun god. Jesus is the eternal and majestic Son of God. Who has eyes like a flame of fire (cf. 1:14; 19:12) – speaks of his penetrating, perceptive, and piercing ability to see all that goes on and to see through the deceptive and seductive teachings of the Jezebel. As eyes of fire there is burning indignation and purifying judgment to all He sees.

2. Know that Jesus’ judgment is powerful.

His feet like fine brass (burnished bronze, *NIV*) – speaks of strength and splendor. Thyatira was famous for its bronze work but their best pales in comparison to that of the Son of God. He is brilliant in appearance, unrivaled in strength, and utterly glorious as a judge. There is stability and permanence to the judgments He renders.

II. Christ commends for faithful works. 2:19

Jesus praises this church where He can and affirms them in a number of crucial and important areas. He knows both the good and the bad, and appropriately addresses both. All churches would do well to follow the church at Thyatira as she is evaluated in verse 19.

1. Let us do good things.

5 aspects of the Church are recognized and praised by the Son of God who sees everything that is happening. He knows your:

- 1) Works (*erga*) – a general word for the godly activity and efforts of the church. The next 4 words “flesh out” the specifics of these works.
- 2) & 3) Love and faith (*correct order in Greek text*) – this addresses their motives for the works they do. Love (*agape*) for Christ and others and faith (*pistin*) in God inspired and moved this church to action. Unlike the church at Ephesus, their love for Christ had not grown cold. Unlike the church at Ephesus, their love for truth had. Ephesians 4:15 teaches us to “speak the truth in love.” 2 and 3 John both emphasize the necessity of both for a balanced Christianity. Ephesus lacked love. Thyatira lacked truth.
- 4) & 5) The service (*diakonian*, “deacon-acts”) and your patience (*upomonen*; longsuffering, steadfastness, [NIV] perseverance) – this notes the results which naturally follow from love and faith. A person with a servant’s spirit is one who will give himself deliberately, voluntarily, sacrificially and joyfully to others in order that he may help meet the goals and needs of their lives. He will walk away from his own concerns and private interests, and give himself, his time, his wisdom, his knowledge, his talents and gifts, in order to help the other person succeed. The qualities of the person with a genuine servant’s spirit will exhibit a spirit of humility, willing to stoop to serve another but never ask for recognition. Dependable (trustworthy), loyal, loving, patient. Here then are 5 things every church should do. Oh, but it gets better.

2. Let us grow in good things.

And as for your works, the last (*eschata*) are more than the first (*proton*).

They had not grown cold or remained stagnant. They were moving on, growing, maturing, progressing in good things for Jesus. This church was not standing still but pressing on. For all of this Jesus applauded and He was pleased. “Do good things and grow in good things” is a wonderful purpose statement for any church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

III. Christ condemns for excessive tolerance. 2:20

Sin should never be swept under the rug, tucked away in a closet or hidden in a corner. It must be confronted in love and dealt with. “Who says?” you might ask. Jesus says, that’s who. With a directness that almost takes your breath away our Lord hits straight away at the sin of tolerance that had infected this church. 4 issues must be addressed if this church, or any church, has any hope of maintaining a viable witness for Jesus.

1. The church must guard against a personality problem.

You allow (cont.) that woman Jezebel ... to teach.

- Jezebel – wicked Phoenician princess who married wicked King Ahab of Israel who led Israel into idolatrous worship of the Canaanite god Baal (1 Kings 16:29-33; 2 Kings 9:30 ff.).
- Jezebel – probably a descriptive epithet or title, not her literal name. We name our dogs Goliath and Nero and our cats Jezebel!

- Was she Lydia (no!), the Sibylline priestess Sambathe (no!), the pastor's wife (probably not!!!). She was a literal woman clever in speech and impressive in personality who professed to know and interpret God's will. She claimed a direct pipeline to God. Her revelations, however, came at a cost: the purity and devotion of the church.
- Application – anything that or anyone who gets our eyes off of the Lord Jesus is not of God. The impressiveness of their gifts and abilities make no difference. Indeed the greater the gifts, the greater the danger.

2. The church must guard against an authority problem.

Who calls herself a prophetess to teach – here was a self-proclaimed leader. Who said she was a prophetess? She did. Not God! She did. That there is a legitimate gift of prophecy that may involve women is clearly taught in Scripture (Anna, Luke 2:36; Philip's daughters, Acts 21:9; cf. also Joel 2:28 ff. – Acts. 2:17; 1 Cor. 11:5). Here, however, was an illegitimate usurpation, an inappropriate seizing of raw ambition. Drawing upon parallels to the wicked Jezebel, Chuck Swindoll says this woman was 1) cleverly deceptive, 2) manipulatively dominant, 3) viciously scheming, and 4) influentially wicked. She clearly was a leader because people were following. But leadership can be good or bad, a blessing or a curse. Someone should have stepped up to the plate and faced her. But no one did.

3. The church must guard against a theology problem.

She taught and seduced (deceived) my servants (*duolos*). Her doctrine was attractive and seductive. At first blush it seemed insightful, deep, perceptive. Why, she had a way of opening the Scriptures that were new and exciting. Her teachings promised freedom but delivered bondage. They promised life but produced death. They promised to exalt Jesus but in actuality they dethroned Jesus. She claimed to have the truth but she peddled a lie. Like the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Christ legalists, the charismatic enthusiasts and the liberal modernists, God's standard was perverted and God's Son removed from His preeminence (Col. 1:18). Theology matters. Truth matters. We must continually be on guard.

4. The church must guard against a morality problem.

Commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. Participation in the trade guilds or unions was a necessity if you were going to make it in Thyatira. It was essential for building community relationships and success in business. Being active and a full participant in the trade union invited participation in pagan feasts and festivals. Sexual liberation and banquets in honor of ones guild deity were the norm. Jezebel said we are free in Christ. He knows your heart and the devotion of your soul. It's not a big deal to God and it should not be a big deal to you. BUT, she was wrong. Sexual immorality and acts of idolatry are a big deal to God. God calls us to holiness not harlotry. God calls us to purity not perversion. God calls us to spiritual fidelity not spiritual adultery. God calls us to follow Him not follow the world (cf. 1 John 2:15-17).

*When the church looks like the world you have a sick church.

*When the church acts like the world you have an impotent church.

*When the church plays with the world you have a pathetic church.

IV. Christ corrects with Godly discipline. **2:21-25**

God is a good heavenly Father who will not let His children just go their own way. With loving but firm discipline He will get involved, up close and personal, if necessary (read Hebrews 12:5-13).

1. God's discipline is fair. **(2:21)**

Time – judgment was not immediate. God's discipline is always wrapped in mercy and grace.

Repent (2x in this verse) – change her mind and to change her ways (lit.) and not she wishes to repent.

God gave her time, she said “no,” and now judgment falls.

2. God's discipline is full. **(2:22)**

She made her bed, she can now lie in it.

Sickbed – a bed of sickness or pain, it denotes severe and debilitating punishment (cf. 1 Cor. 11:27-29).

Commit adultery – marital infidelity! We are the bride of Christ married to Him. He alone is to be our Lord and lover.

Repent of their (or her) deeds – her time to repent has past. Her heart is so turned away from God that further delay has no benefit. Her followers' situation is not as dire, yet!

- They still have time, but the clock is ticking.
- She receives a bed of sickness. They will receive intense suffering unless they turn from their sin.

3. God's discipline is final. **(2:23)**

I will kill her children – (lit. “I will kill with death her children. This is a Hebraism of intensity.) Her children is representative of her spiritual followers. God will remove those who are beyond repentance and restoration.

- There is sin unto physical death for a Christian.

4. God's discipline is fearful. **(2:23)**

All the churches shall know.

I am (*ego eimi*) searches (cont.) the minds (lit. “kidneys”) and hearts.

And I will give ...

Jeremiah 17:10 – “I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds.”

Matthew 16:27 – “For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds.”

Romans 2:6 – “Who will render to every man according to his deeds:”

- What you do He sees.
- What you think He knows.
- What you work for you will receive.

5. God's discipline is faithful. **(2:24-25)**

Depths of Satan – 1) sarcastic caricature or 2) libertarians actual claim. Mounce says, “the deep things of Satan may be a reference to the view that in order to appreciate fully the grace of God one must first plumb the depths of evil. Later gnosticism [view that matter is evil and spirit is good] boasted that it was precisely by entering

into the stronghold of Satan that believers could learn the limits of his power and emerge victorious” [pp. 105-106].

Jezebel claimed she could lead the church into the “deeper life” of God, into greater depths of spiritual understanding and experience. She offered a “Jesus plus theology.” However, what she actually gave them was the deeper lie of Satan, spiritual ignorance and a “no Jesus theology.”

- Jesus says stay with me and I will put (cast) on you no other burden.
- Jesus says stay with me. Don’t follow the seduction of Satan, the doctrine of demons.
- Jesus says “hold fast” (imperative) what you have ‘til I come.

LISTEN: WHAT YOU HAVE IS JESUS AND JESUS IS ALL YOU NEED (NOW AND FOREVER)!

V. **Christ challenges with future promises.** **2:26-29**

We need to hold on to who Jesus is and what Jesus says. In the present He is all we need and in the future He will provide all we will want.

1. **We receive the authority of Christ’s power.** **(2:26-27)**

Overcomes (pre. tense) and keeps (pre. tense; means to guard, watch over) My works (will, *NIV*).

My works until the end. To keep Christ’s works is to keep His word, His will. To do so until the end is to “hold fast to what we have.” Jesus said in Matthew 24:13, “he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” Vance Havner said, “faith that fizzles before the finish was faulty from the first.” Perseverance is a proof of our profession and an evidence of our possession. Leon Morris reminds us, “the Christian life is not a battle but a campaign.” Christ honors the dedicated disciple by allowing him to co-reign with Him in the fulfillment of Psalm 2:8 – 9 (v.27). This is a reference to his millennial kingdom, Christ’s 1000 year reign on the earth (cf. Rev. 20:1-6).

- Rule is literally “shepherd.” Believers will serve under Christ, sitting on thrones (Matt 19:28; Rev. 20:4), exercising gracious, but firm and effective authority over the nations.

2. **We receive the assurance of Christ’s presence.** **(2:28-29)**

Morning star – 1) Lucifer (cf. Is. 14:12); 2) immortality (Dan. 12:3); 3) dawn of eternal life; 4) literal reference to planet Venus; 5) Holy Spirit. No, let the text itself inform us in Rev. 22:16: **IT IS JESUS!!** When the end comes (v. 26) we get Jesus!

- Follow the deep things of Satan and you get a fallen star. Follow the dear Lord Jesus and you get the morning star.
- Note the challenge appears last beginning with Thyatira and continuing through the 3 churches in chapter 4.

Conclusion

- Southern Baptists gathered in Salt Lake City, Utah in June, 1998. As is our custom, we preceded the meeting with an evangelistic effort called Crossover Salt Lake City.
- One of our students had lunch with a Mormon and his question to the Mormon: “If you had to trust Jesus or Joseph Smith to get you to heaven who would you trust?” His answer after some consideration: Joseph Smith.

- When it comes to Jezebel, Joseph Smith or any other besides Jesus, go with and stay with Jesus. I promise you, he will not disappoint you.